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Ms. Krafft

In this section of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the ghost of Sethe’s daughter manifests itself in the form of a tangible, young woman. The woman, called Beloved, brings with her the ability to make Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. each comply with her every whim and desire. Beloved’s ability to control the people around her is metaphorical for the family’s troubled history and the way the memories of their trauma influence their lives.

One of the most notable aspects of Beloved’s character is her ability to force each character to face their personal demons willingly. A major example of this ability to persuade characters to disclose information they would have otherwise hidden is seen when Beloved asks Sethe about her [Sethe’s] mother. Like most other memories from her time of enslavement, Sethe’s memories of her mother are riddled with grief and distress, from and encounter with her mother’s branding scar to her death by hanging. Upon being asked, Sethe answers all of Beloved’s queries, and soon realizes that “she had forgotten” most of the horrid memories prior to Beloved’s questioning. Similarly, Beloved coerces Paul D. into begin a sexual relationship with her, despite his distaste for her “shining”. Even Denver, who never knew the horrors of slavery first-hand, is effected by Beloved’s charms, feeling a sense failure and distress when Beloved rejects her attempts to be near her. Why would Morrison construct Beloved in such a way that every character is so drawn to her, even though she brings nothing but stress and despair?

As a function of the story, Beloved appears to be a personification of the family’s troubled past. It is a generally accepted belief in the modern world that the only way to truly move one from one’s traumatic past is to confront those issues head on and to resolve them. However, this is a relatively new psychological concept, and was therefore unheard of during the post-Civil War era in which this story is set. That being said, the characters deal with their bleak memories in the best way they know how: burying them deep within their minds, hoping to never remember them again. Paul D. has his self-proclaimed “tobacco tin buried in his chest”, while Sethe tries not to think of such things. However, Beloved takes them out of their comfortable state of denial, forcing them to face their horrors. Beloved’s ability to control the family’s actions and compel them to uncover their most safely guarded secrets speaks to the nature of the past and the effects of trying to conceal it.

Beloved’s control mirrors the way in which the past forces the family to act certain ways. Whether the characters realize it or not, their dealings with slavery have had a profound impact on their growth and development as people. Beloved’s ability to force them into recounting a troubling memory or acting in ways that they would not otherwise paints the picture of a family who has lost control of themselves. Indeed, as Beloved is able to manipulate and effect the family’s actions, so do their chilling pasts. Subconsciously, the family’s past experiences effect every single thing they do; Beloved prompts these experiences to manifest themselves in reality.